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For Immediate Release

Feb. 12, 2010

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VA Announces Simulated Training Initiative

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has developed the Simulated Learning Enhancement and Advanced Research Network (SimLEARN), a system-wide strategic education and planning initiative to optimize clinical simulation training, education and research efforts.

The SimLEARN initiative includes the establishment of the SimLEARN National Center, at Orlando, Fla., with a satellite office at the VA Palo Alto Health Care System (VAPAHCS) in California.

The use of Simulation training was pioneered at the VA in Palo Alto, including the use of mannequin-based, fully interactive simulators in anesthesiology, intensive care, emergency medicine and other clinical settings.

Under the direction of Dr. David M. Gaba, co-director of the VA Simulation Center, the group has led simulations for research and training since 1986, running a dedicated simulation center at the Palo Alto VA since 1995. Its current facility, which occupies 2,400 square feet, contains a replica operating room, a replica ED/ICU/ward, four patient simulators and complete audiovisual recording, annotating, and playback capabilities.

"The personnel of the Simulation Center at VAPAHCS are world-pioneers in the application of simulation to health care," said Dr. Gaba. "Simulation is a technique, (with or without technology), to safely re-create the real world of clinical care for purposes of education, training, performance assessment, systems probing, or research."

VAPAHCS applies simulation using various methods to address multiple populations including students, physicians (interns, residents, and experienced personnel), nursing, and allied health professionals. Different exercises may be directed at individuals, single-discipline crews (e.g. anesthesiologists), or combined teams that do or might actually work together (e.g. ICU team, cardiac arrest resuscitation team).

The faculty level simulation group at the VAPAHCS consists of approximately six regular VA physicians and two private physicians that come from anesthesiology, intensive care, and cardiac surgery, although they teach learners from many domains and specialties in health care.

"Together, the group has more than 70 person-years of experience in simulation," said Dr. Gaba. "They actually represent the longest continuously working medical simulation group in the world."

As such, Dr. Gaba and his team will serve as trainers and advisors to clinical leaders from VA Central Office who are now engaged in planning the VA national simulation program. The new Center in Florida is expected to be completed in December 2011; however, temporary space at the Orlando VA Medical Center will be used to support the SimLEARN mission in the interim. At Palo Alto, SimLEARN staff will use existing space at the Palo Alto Division of the health care system to support their activities.



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